Intimate Relationships

Was Erikson correct about the importance of intimate relationships in early adulthood? Statistics on household composition in the United States suggest that he was (see [**Figure 14.2**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36060)). Households are about evenly divided between those headed by a married couple and those involving other kinds of relationships (Lofquist, Lugalla, O’Connell, & Feliz, [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid59232)). However, a broader interpretation of the data suggests that “coupled” households continue to be more common among adults than those that are headed by singles (55% versus 42%). Furthermore, many individuals in the single-person-household and single-parent-household groups were previously married or partnered, and many of them have partners who also live in single-person households. Thus, partnering, or as Erikson would put it, the search for intimacy, continues to be an important facet of adult life in the United States.

Marriage

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| **LO 14.5** | **How do marriage and divorce affect the lives of young adults?** |

News reports about the trend toward later marriage in the United States today might make you think the popularity of this ancient institution is on the wane. Indeed, the average age at first marriage in the United States rose from about 21 for both men and women in 1970 to 29 for men and 27 for women in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, [**2013**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid60089)). Still, the wedding industry in the United States is booming (*The Wedding Report*, Inc. [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62232)). Marketing surveys show that more than 2 million weddings take place every year, with an average of 138 guests in attendance. June is still the favored month for marrying, and brides overwhelmingly choose to adorn their bridesmaids in blues, pinks, and purples (*Wedding Report*, [**2013**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62232)). Couples spend over $50 billion on engagement jewelry, engagement and wedding social gatherings (e.g., engagement parties, showers), wedding books and magazines, wedding apparel, wedding accessories (e.g., flowers), catering, bride’s and groom’s cakes, disc jockeys and bands, photographers and videographers, honeymoons, and other wedding-related items (*The Wedding Report*, Inc. [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62232)). What has changed in recent years is that couples are more likely to pay for their own weddings these days than in the past, when they relied on parents to fund nuptial ceremonies. In addition, wedding apparel, locations, and other features vary widely from one couple to another. In fact, the largest proportion of weddings, some 37%, are classified by wedding planners as “fun” weddings with themes such as the couple’s favorite sport, movie, or band (*The Wedding Report*, Inc. [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62232)). Clearly, the institution of marriage is alive and well (see [***No Easy Answers***](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_003.xhtml#eid242)).

RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

While we often discuss differences across ethnic groups, you can see in [**Figure 14.3**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36236) on [**page 357**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36233) that there is a remarkable amount of agreement across groups about what makes a marriage work (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, [**2007**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62177)). Importantly, a large majority of adults in all groups believe that intimacy issues—that is, faithfulness and a satisfactory sexual relationship—are more important than the material aspects of marriage, such as how labor is divided and having an adequate income. Thus, relationship quality appears to be what most people look for to judge whether their marriages are satisfactory.

Many powerful influences on marital success are in place long before a marriage even begins. Each partner brings to the relationship certain skills, resources, and traits that affect the emerging partnership system. The personality characteristics of the partners seem especially important. For example, shyness in one or both spouses is associated with low levels of marital satisfaction, presumably because of the link between shyness and effective communication skills (Baker & McNulty, [**2010**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid54537)). In addition, neuroticism and personality-disorder symptoms in one or both partners usually leads to dissatisfaction and instability in the relationship (Stroud, Durbin, Saigal, & Knobloch-Fedders, [**2010**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62041)).

BECOMING A PARENT

A large majority of young adults who do not have children say that they would like to become parents (Riskind & Patterson, [**2010**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid61012); Virtala, Kunttu, Huttunen, & Virjo, [**2006**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62659)). Despite the opportunistic attitude toward mating that evolutionary theory ascribes to men, the percentage of men who feel strongly that they want to become parents and who view parenting as a life-enriching experience is actually greater than the percentage of women who feel this way (Horowitz, McLaughlin, & White, [**1998**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid57947); Muzi, [**2000**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid60005)). Furthermore, most expectant fathers become emotionally attached to their unborn children during the third trimester of pregnancy and eagerly anticipate the birth (White, Wilson, Elander, & Persson, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62893)).

As we noted in [**Chapter 3**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_010.xhtml#eid8290), in 1970, the average age at which a woman delivered her first child was 21.4 years in the United States. By contrast, in 2010, the average was 25 years (Martin et al., [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid59542)). One reason that contemporary cohorts delay parenthood is that more of them are enrolled in postsecondary education than were their parents and grandparents in their own early adulthood years. Moreover, the majority of young adults in the United States believe that the best environment for raising a child is a household headed by a married couple (Taylor et al., [**2007**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62177)). Thus, the *social clock*—the ages at which adults are expected to achieve specific milestones—underlies all these trends. Although it doesn’t include specific ages for the milestones of adulthood, the social clock in the United States today does include the idea that people ought to become socially and economically established before they bring children into the world.

THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

The transition to parenthood can be very stressful. New parents may argue about child-rearing philosophy, as well as how, when, where, and by whom child-care chores should be done (Reichle & Gefke, [**1998**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid60905)). Both parents are usually also physically exhausted, perhaps even seriously sleep deprived, because their newborn keeps them up for much of the night. Predictably, new parents report that they have much less time for each other—less time for conversation, for sex, for simple affection, or even for doing routine chores together (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, [**1985**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid54758)). However, the quality of new parents’ relationship helps to moderate the stresses associated with caring for a newborn. The more secure and committed the relationship is, the more resilient the parents and their relationship are (Bouchard, 2014).  **Watch** the **Video** *Transition to Parenthood* in **MyPsychLab**.

Some cultures have developed ritualized rites of passage for this important transition, which can help new parents manage stress. For example, in Hispanic cultures, *la cuarenta* is a period of 40 days following the birth of a child, during which fathers are expected to take on typically feminine tasks such as housework. Extended-family members are also expected to help out. Researchers have found that Hispanic couples who observe *la cuarenta* adjust to parenthood more easily than those who do not (Niska, Snyder, & Lia-Hoagberg, [**1998**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid60242)).

DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT OF PARENTHOOD

Despite its inherent stressfulness, the transition to parenthood is associated with positive behavior change: Sensation seeking and risky behaviors decline considerably when young adults become parents (Arnett, [**1998**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid54405)). However, marital satisfaction tends to decline after the birth of a child. The general pattern is that such satisfaction is at its peak before the birth of the first child, after which it drops and remains at a lower level until the last child leaves home (Rollins & Feldman, [**1970**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid61097)). The best-documented portion of this curvilinear pattern is the drop in marital satisfaction after the birth of the first child, for which there is both longitudinal and cross-sectional evidence. Other studies suggest that the decline in marital satisfaction is characteristic of contemporary cohorts of new parents as well, and researchers have found a pattern of marital satisfaction similar to that reported by Rollins and Feldman across a variety of cultures (Bouchard, 2014; Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, [**2003**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62384)). Nevertheless, studies that examine the relationship between marital satisfaction and parenthood in a more complex fashion suggest that it is neither universal nor inevitable. Longitudinal studies show that the length of time that a couple have been together before having their first child, the amount of education they have, and the number of children that they have are all positively related to marital satisfaction (Jose & Alfons, [**2007**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid58248)).

The link between marital satisfaction and parenthood probably results from one or more underlying factors. One such factor is the division of labor. The more a partner feels that he or she is carrying an unfair proportion of the economic, household, or child-care workload, the greater his or her loss of satisfaction (Wicki, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62908)). Support from extended-family members is another variable that predicts maintenance or loss of satisfaction (Lee & Keith, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid58985)). Moreover, couples who have established effective conflict-resolution strategies before the birth of a child experience less loss of satisfaction (Bouchard, 2014; Cox, Paley, Burchinal, & Payne, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid55999); Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, [**1997**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid59149)).  **Watch** the **Video***Middle Adulthood: Portraits of Marriage and Parenthood* in **MyPsychLab**.

It’s important to keep in mind, too, that new parents who are married or cohabiting experience a much smaller decline in overall life satisfaction than new single parents, whose lives are far more complicated and stressful (Copeland & Harbaugh, [**2010**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid55957); Lee, Law, & Tam, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid58985)). Likewise, single mothers are less likely to advance to management positions at work, perhaps because they are viewed less positively than single fathers or married parents of both genders (DeJean, McGeorge, & Carlson, [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid56228); Tharenou, [**1999**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62226)). Instead of focusing on declines in relationship satisfaction, some developmentalists suggest that more attention be paid to the consistent finding that having a parenting partner—especially one to whom one is married—is a significant protective factor in managing the stressful transition to parenthood.

Career Development

|  |  |
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| **LO 14.12** | **How do career goals and job satisfaction change over time?** |

Once the job or career has been chosen, what kinds of experiences do young adults have in their work life? [**Career development**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_037.xhtml#eid52402) is the process of adapting to the workplace, managing career transitions, and pursuing personal goals through employment. Psychologists who study career development focus on issues such as the phases of workplace adaptation, job satisfaction, and the ways in which individuals integrate work with other aspects of their lives.

**career development** the process of adapting to the workplace, managing career transitions, and pursuing goals through employment

SUPER’S STAGE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Psychologist Donald Super claims that the roots of the career development process are found in infancy. Between birth and age 14, Super says, we are in the *growth stage*, a period during which we learn about our abilities and interests. Next comes the *exploratory stage*, roughly from 15 to 24. In this stage, the young person must decide on a job or career, and he searches for a fit between his interests and personality and the jobs available. The whole process involves a good deal of trial and error as well as luck or chance. Perhaps because many of the jobs available to those in this age range are not terribly challenging and because many young adults have not yet found the right fit, job changes are at their peak during this period.

Next comes the *establishment stage* (also called the *stabilization stage*), roughly from age 25 to age 45. Having chosen an occupation, the young person must learn the ropes and begin to move through the early steps in some career ladder as he masters the needed skills, perhaps with a mentor’s help. In this period, the worker also focuses on fulfilling whatever aspirations or goals he may have set for himself. In Levinson’s terms, he tries to fulfill his dream. The young scientist pushes himself to make an important discovery; the young attorney strives to become a partner; the young business executive tries to move as far up the ladder as he can; the young blue-collar worker may aim for job stability or promotion to foreman. It is in these years that most promotions occur.

Which of Holland’s personality types best suits a young adult for working in a setting such as this?

Assistance with child care is one of many quality of work–life (QWL) policies that some organizations have implemented in recent years.

The final phase of career development in Super’s model is the *maintenance stage*. It begins around age 45 and ends at retirement. The primary goals of the maintenance stage are to protect and maintain the gains that were made during the establishment stage. To accomplish these goals, older workers must keep up with new developments in their fields. They must also acquire new skills in order to avoid becoming obsolete. Moreover, individuals in the maintenance phase must make preparations for retirement.

Super’s model is useful for describing the challenges that individuals face in the various phases of their careers. However, to be validly applied in today’s rapidly changing economy, Super’s stages must be thought of independently from the ages to which he originally linked them (Super, [**1990**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid62079)). This is necessary because of the frequency with which adults change careers or move from one workplace to another. Thus, regardless of age, a person who makes a major career change probably exhibits the characteristics of Super’s exploratory stage prior to doing so and experiences some of the features of his establishment and maintenance phases in the years following the change.

JOB SATISFACTION

Early studies of job satisfaction found that it was at its lowest in early adulthood and rose steadily until retirement (Glenn & Weaver, [**1985**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid57280)). More recently, however, researchers have found that satisfaction is lowest at mid-career, usually toward the end of the early adulthood period (Fullerton & Wallace, [**2007**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid57028); Larson, [**2012**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid58921)). This trend is attributable to changes in workers’ perceptions of job security. In the past, security increased with time on the job. Today, job security is elusive because of the speed with which job requirements and employers’ priorities shift. Thus, workers who have been on the job for some time are no longer assured of having greater security, higher incomes, or higher-status positions than beginning workers.

Research also suggests that a number of important variables contribute to job satisfaction in young adults. As with almost every life situation, individual personality traits such as optimism and neuroticism affect job satisfaction (Judge, Bono, & Locke, [**2000**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid58273); Wright & Bonett, [**2007**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid63038)). Moreover, the degree to which a worker perceives his career as consistent with his personality predicts his level of job satisfaction (Harzer & Ruch, [**2013**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid57711)). In addition, young adults engaged in careers for which they prepared in high school or college have higher levels of satisfaction (Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, & Finkelberg, [**1997**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_038.xhtml#eid55018)).

Theories of Social and Personality Development ([**pp. 350**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid35798)–[**353**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid35965))

**LO 14.1 What did Erikson mean when he described early adulthood as a crisis of intimacy versus isolation?**

* • Erikson proposed that young adults who fail to establish a stable relationship with an intimate partner or a network of friends become socially isolated.

**LO 14.2 What is a life structure, and how does it change?**

* • Levinson’s concept of the life structure includes all the roles that a person occupies, all of his or her relationships, and the conflicts and balance that exist among them. He hypothesized that adult development involves alternating periods of stability and instability, through which adults construct and refine life structures.

**LO 14.3 What are the characteristics of emerging adulthood?**

* • The parts of the brain involved in decision making and self-control mature between the late teens and early 20s. Emerging adults use skills they acquired earlier in life to accomplish developmental tasks in the academic, conduct, and friendship domains. New skills are required for tasks in the work and romantic domains.

Intimate Relationships ([**pp. 353**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid35965)–[**361**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36443))

**LO 14.4 What factors do evolutionary and social role theorists emphasize in their theories of mate selection?**

* • Evolutionary theories of mate selection suggest that sex differences in mate preferences and mating behavior are the result of natural selection. Social role theory emphasizes factors such as gender roles, similarity, and economic exchange in explaining sex differences in mating.

**LO 14.5 How do marriage and divorce affect the lives of young adults?**

* • Personality characteristics, as well as attachment and love, contribute to marital success. In general, married adults are happier, healthier, live longer, and have lower rates of psychological disorders than singles do. Divorce tends to increase young adults’ risk of depression, suicide, and adverse outcomes such as accidents, absenteeism from work, illness, loss of self-esteem, feelings of failure, and loneliness.

**LO 14.6 What factors contribute to the relationship between premarital cohabitation and divorce?**

* • People who cohabit prior to marriage are more likely to divorce than those who don’t. However, research has shown that among cohabiting couples in which the intention to marry is firm and the woman has had no prior cohabitation experience, divorce or dissatisfaction with the relationship is no more likely than among couples who do not live together before marriage.

**LO 14.7 In what ways are gay and lesbian couples similar to and different from heterosexual couples?**

* • The factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction are similar across homosexual and heterosexual couples. However, the two types of couples often differ in the power relation within the partnership. Further, monogamy is not as important to gay male couples as it is to lesbian or heterosexual partners.

**LO 14.8 How do singles accomplish Erikson’s psychosocial developmental task of intimacy?**

* • People who do not have intimate partners rely on family members and friends for intimacy. After many years of singlehood, unpartnered adults tend to incorporate “singleness” into their sense of personal identity. Continuous singles are more likely to experience a positive adult developmental path than divorced or widowed singles.

Parenthood and Other Relationships ([**pp. 361**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36443)–[**365**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36702))

**LO 14.9 What happens during the transition to parenthood?**

* • Most men and women want to become parents because they view raising children as a life-enriching experience. The transition to parenthood is stressful and leads to a decline in relationship satisfaction. Factors such as the division of labor between mother and father, individual personality traits, and the availability of help from extended-family members contribute to relationship satisfaction.

**LO 14.10 How are family and friends important to young adults?**

* • Young adults’ relationships with their parents tend to be steady and supportive, even if they are less central than they were at earlier ages. The quality of attachment to parents continues to predict a number of important variables in early adulthood. Each young adult creates a network of relationships with friends as well as with a partner and family members.

The Role of Worker ([**pp. 365**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid36702)–[**370**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781323031223/epub/OPS/loc_026.xhtml#eid37039))

**LO 14.11 What factors influence an individual’s occupational choices?**

* • The specific job or career a young adult chooses is affected by his or her education, intelligence, family background and resources, family values, personality, and gender. The majority of adults choose jobs that fit the cultural norms for their social class and gender. More intelligent young people, and those with more education, are more upwardly mobile.

**LO 14.12 How do career goals and job satisfaction change over time?**

* • Job satisfaction rises steadily throughout early adulthood, in part because the jobs typically available to young adults are less well paid, more repetitive, and less creative and allow the worker very little power or influence.

**LO 14.13 What are some of the innovations that are associated with the quality of work–life movement?**

* • The QWL movement includes on-site child care, telecommuting, flextime, and job sharing. These innovations help employees achieve a balance between work and nonwork roles.

**LO 14.14 In what way do women’s work patterns differ from those of men?**

* • For most women, the work role includes an additional in-and-out stage, in which periods of focusing on family responsibilities alternate with periods of employment. The more continuous a woman’s work history, the more successful she is likely to be at her job.

*Resources:*

*Boyd, D., Bee, H. (2015). Lifespan Development (7th ed.). Pearson Education*